

LINK Community Development

March 2016

Development of the National Education Standards in Malawi

In August 2015 the Principal Secretary of Education in the Government of Malawi launched National Education Standards to be used in all Malawian primary and secondary schools, as facilitated by Scottish charity Link Community Development International (Link) funded by the Scottish Government. This is as a result of a sustained partnership between Link, district officials and staff in the Ministry of Education Science and Technology, teachers and parents in Malawi.

The finalisation of the National Education Standards is a major achievement which will improve the quality of education for millions of Malawian pupils, over many years – a significant achievement for a comparatively small Scottish-based organisation and a major outcome from a programme of work funded by the Scottish Government's Malawi Development Programme.

The Challenge

Previously, the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology did not have a unified set of standards against which the performance of schools could be measured. Standards exist, but they are spread across in a wide range of documents, including the Education Act (2012) and guidelines for inspection. The Department of Inspection and Advisory Services (DIAS) regards the production of a set of unified National Education Standards (NES) as an essential foundation for improving school performance.

The Director of the Department of Inspection and Advisory Services, Mr Raphael Agabu, explains: *"The Standards are the key tool for improving school performance. These are not "our" Standards, but are for everyone involved in school improvement. They will show schools what to aim for, guide the way Primary Education Advisors [PEAs] support schools, and structure the work of Inspectors who assess the performance of both schools and PEAs."*



Kipondo Full Primary School, Neno District

The Intervention

Link worked with DIAS to create a set of practical, comprehensive National Education Standards which can be used by all school stakeholders from Inspectors to teachers to school committees. This was done in collaboration with the Education Standards Working Group which included key members of the departments of Inspection and Advisory Services, Basic Education, Secondary Education and Teacher Development and Education. These key stakeholders reflected on the existing standards in their work and their professional opinion of an effective school. They produced a set of 27 standards against which to measure primary and secondary school performance.

18 representatives of MoEST Directorates, Technical Working Groups (TWGs), Donor Partners, and Civil Society Organisations have been consulted and their feedback incorporated into the draft Standards. Plans are in place for a wider consultation with District staff, teachers, parents and school committees in primary and secondary schools in Dedza using a standard template to gather feedback.

The National Education Standards

The NES are statements which specify levels of provision, practice or outcomes which the Ministry expects to be in place in every school in Malawi. The standards set out a minimum acceptable level of provision, practice or outcome which every school must meet. Any school which does not meet this minimum level requires urgent support to improve. The NES also describes practice which is better than the minimum, but is still achievable within the resource-scarce context of Malawi. This gives schools something achievable to aim for in order to improve and helps them to build steps for improvement into their School Improvement Plans.

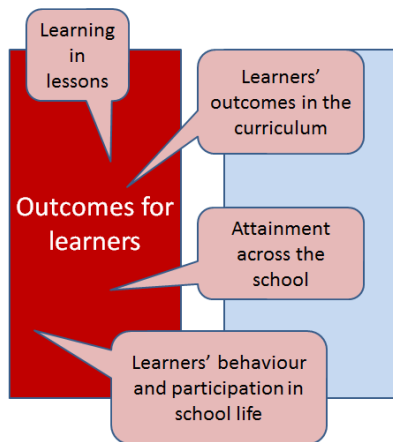
The standards focus on the extent to which the school fulfils the needs of children.



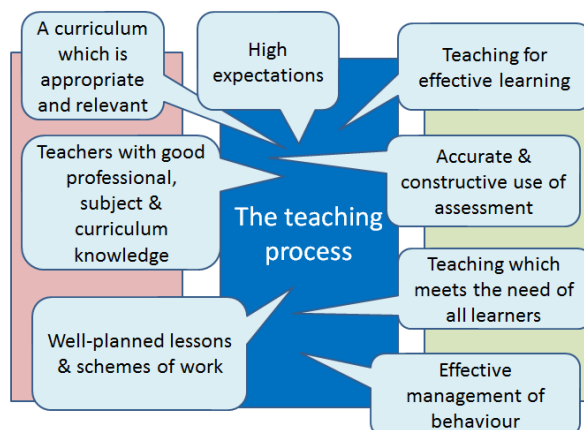
Chikonde Community Day Secondary School students in class

The set of 27 Standards is organised within **three** key areas:

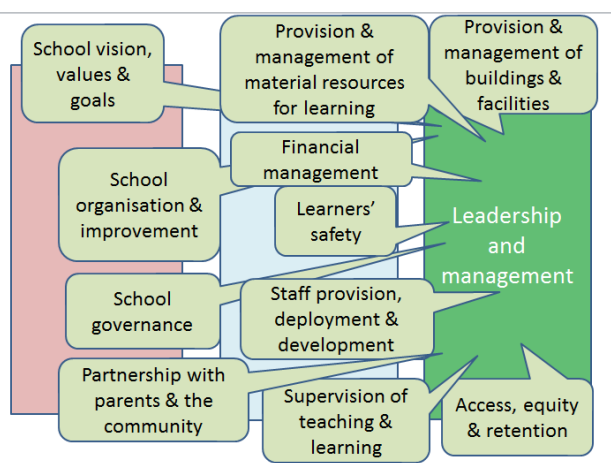
1. the **key outcomes of a school education for learners** – what learners achieve, or how they benefit from going to that school;



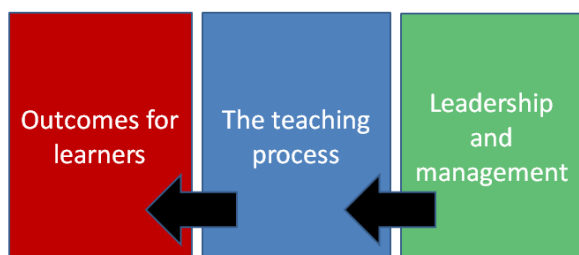
2. the **main activities** which go on in schools which enable learners to achieve these outcomes – their core business (the teaching process);



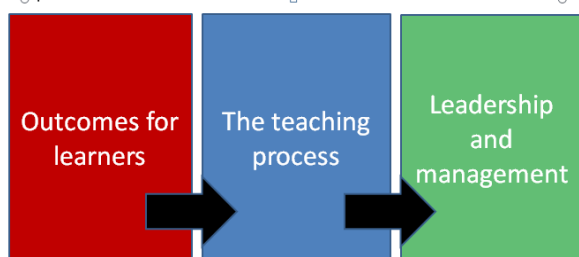
3. important processes relating to **leadership, management and governance** which enable the school's main teaching and learning activities to take place.



The relationship between these three elements is causal:



The model can also be used diagnostically, to identify the key factors influencing good/poor practice:



The impact

Using a set of National Education Standards will enable more accurate and consistent reporting to the government and to national and international organisations which will also enable comparisons over time.

The NES will help schools to improve, as they provide benchmarks against which they can review their provision and practice and plan and then take action for improvement.

Standards may be used to:

- identify areas of focus for support supervision, school self-evaluation, school performance review and inspection;
- provide topics for discussions with learners, parents and staff and empower these stakeholders to participate in the school improvement process;
- select priorities for school or district improvement plans;
- plan training of education professionals at all levels within the system;
- provide advice about educational priorities to a range of audiences;
- evaluate, monitor and report on the quality of education in individual schools, within local areas and across the country as a whole;
- encourage consistent, valid and reliable approaches to evaluation; and
- foster mutual understanding among education stakeholders.

The Director of the Department of Inspection and Advisory Services, Mr Raphael Agabu, says:
“Headteachers and teachers have their own role in school improvement processes. This is subject to National Education Standards so they don’t work in a vacuum... The community and parents have a big role to see what happens between the teacher and the child in the school environment. Beyond that others have to look whether there is a favourable environment for learning and evaluate the impact on learning... The ultimate goal in 2017 is school self-evaluation and giving the Standards to schools so they know what they should look like and the stages they should go through to be seen as effective schools.”

The Scottish perspective

Humza Yousaf, Minister for Europe and International Development at the time, said:

“Link Community Development have delivered a remarkable project that will raise standards and drive up the quality of education across Malawi. Better education is key to breaking the cycle of poverty in developing nations and their work will improve the prospects for a generation of children.”

“Through strong partnerships and collaboration with the people of Malawi they have made a lasting change in Malawi. Their work is a great demonstration of how targeted projects working directly with local people succeed. This is the philosophy behind all of the Scottish Government’s international development funding and we are proud to support the work of Link Community Development and other Scottish NGOs in Malawi.”

Scottish Government provided funding for Link’s first programme in Malawi in 2006, through its then newly established International Development Fund. This enabled Link to operate as an effective NGO in Malawi, drawing upon Scottish experience and Link’s work in school improvement across Sub-Saharan Africa. Link became recognised as a successful support agency for change, and as a result was awarded funding from other international donors to expand its work.

The Scottish Government has provided a total of £2.3 million in grants to Link Community Development for its educational work in Malawi, through a number of individual grants, since the start of its International Development Fund ten years ago. This has been through a competitive and rigorous grants application process. Each of these grants has delivered tangible educational outcomes in Malawi, transforming the lives of a great many in Malawi, especially in Mulanje and Dedza. Only the most recent of these grants has been focused on the National Education Standards but there has been a cumulative effect through this sustained commitment which has allowed Link to build trusted relationships and a strong reputation in Malawi.

The Scotland Malawi Partnership

David Hope-Jones, Principal Officer of the Scotland Malawi Partnership, said:

“We’re delighted that the new National Education Standards, developed by Link Community Development with the Government of Malawi, have been agreed and are to be rolled out across every school in Malawi. This is a huge success for a relatively small Scottish charity: the result of a long-standing two-way partnership with Malawi.

“All credit to the Scottish Government’s Malawi Development Programme which has made a sustained commitment to this cause over the last ten years. Too often funders look for short-term fixes, parachuting in western solutions, and with little impact. Here we can see the culmination of almost a decade of work: incredible nationwide impact achieved with comparably modest resource because of a sustained commitment to dignified two-way partnerships.”

NIDOS

Annie Lewis, Chair of the international development sector’s umbrella body NIDOS, said:

“It is very exciting to see Link Community Development’s strong and long term partnership work with the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology in Malawi resulting in this significant announcement. It opens the door to a real step change in the quality of education in Malawi. Link’s work is an excellent example of how funding from the Scottish Government’s Malawi Aid programme has made significant impact. This will benefit millions of school children in Malawi over many years.”